

Please, Let's Stop the Barking

From Inside the Home

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For every "bad" behavior ask yourself how can I remove the stimulus until I can I train an alternative, reinforcing behavior. Management is critical because barking is extremely self reinforcing so if you aren't there to obtain a better response, then the dog will continually reinforce himself by continuing the barking. So the solution to door and window barking is:

1. Prevent the stimulus when you aren't there; by crating the dog, keeping the dog away from the windows through better management
2. When you are there train an alternate behavior that is more fun for the dog than barking.

Let's start with the management question, which should help reduce the stimulus. First, cut off the visual stimulus by covering up the windows so the dog can't see outside. Things like hanging some window drapes, or putting up some sort of barrier ought to cut down on the stimulus tremendously. I always believe in using preventative (management) techniques until I have time to install the desired behaviors to replace those that were not so desirable. YOU could also set up a safe area for the dog to stay in while you are gone so that he can't be over stimulated by going to the windows and barking and rehearsing this old behavior.

For those dogs that bark at door knocking then post a warning note outside your door. It should explain that you are working on teaching your dog to respond politely to guests and you will be right with them. Ask your visitor to please be patient. Have a box of treats outside the door so once they do meet your dog they can reinforce for quiet and calm behavior. His way they will not become impatient when it takes you a while to get to the door.

As of 2009 - Each of my dogs have had different behaviors they do when folks show up at the house. "Tucker" my adopted Aussie who is now 14yr of age use to run down stairs and bark until I was ready to have him greet my guest. This was much better than barking at the door, but now I'm working on teaching an alternative behavior for the barking down stairs, because he is having difficulty going up and down the stairs. I've decided to have him go to a mat away from the door and lie down and be quiet. Because I'm home more often now that I'm self employed once again. I'm now able to really reinforce this new behavior.

"Dazzle" who is 8 years of age will move away from the door and jump onto the chair or ottoman and lies quietly until they leave. She would prefer, not, to say Hi anyway!

"Abby" the Mini Poodle (who is now deceased-bless her little soul) use to greets folks with me at the door with doggie kisses she never jumped up unless invited.

"Jax" my newest member is 2years of age is now the one to run down the stairs until I invite him up to say hi.

So you need to find out what works best for you and your dog! That's what makes teaching so interesting; each dog is such an individual. No one idea will work for all situations so be ready to think outside the box:

Try to think of some alternative behaviors for indoors that might be lots of fun for you and your dog

together. Some golden retrievers and labs love to greet with something in their mouths... so keep a toy box close by.

With planning, and plenty of rehearsing of the "new" behavior you could then do these just before the dog starts getting wound up in excitement at hearing company driving into the driveway.

Remember that you have to compete with the fun of barking so assemble some piles of very tasty treats, have them handy to use nearby. [You could cut up pieces and put them in plastic baggies in the fridge. Try some *Tuna or Liver Brownies. I'd also use some keep some end cuts of deli roast beef or turkey in the freezer in baggies or little cubes of cheddar cheese is another favorite around here.]

One of the clicker games my dogs like particularly is targeting. A few years ago we practiced closing doors with a lid from a container of yogurt. "Abby" learned to touch the lid and then I placed the lid on a door so she use to run around and closes all the open doors. This shows you how reinforcing this game was for Abby and I only did it a few times, there are no longer any lids on the doors but she felts it' was her JOB to close them all while I was preparing their food. Tucker and Dazzle do 101 things with a stool, box or chair love to step up on the footstool, or interact with a cardboard box or chair and they will hop into, hop over, sit in or lie down inside of the box Crawl under a chair , walk around or sit up on I have even shaped placing his chin on the chair☺ . It's really funny, and they love the game. Recently Tucker was becoming sensitized to thunder storms so now out comes the box and we play the game. The other day when a storm was brewing he went over and picked up the box and brought it to me. What a "light bulb" moment.

Playing fetch is also a wonderful alternative game to play. I have always suggested teaching the retrieve with the "plush material" type of toys. Most dogs will dash after it, grab the toy, and bring it back, for a Click/Treat. I don't click/ treat any longer for the game itself is reinforcing. But in the beginning it was really necessary for it slows the dog down and prevents re-grabbing for the toy again. For the dogs that really don't find fetch games interesting using the clicker works great! And then for a click and treat they have become great retrievers. Just start shaping touching the toy or standing near it with in a few clicks the toy will really mean something to the dog. Usually takes less than a week to shape a reliable fetching game. I have an 8 yr old hound that is having a blast fetching his ducky and he didn't have any skills or ever new how to play. He was adopted form the shelter a yr ago and now his owner is having fun watching her old dog learn a new trick.

To repeat - barking at people when looking out the window or when someone knocks is difficult to eliminate because it is fun and self-reinforcing. You have to apply creative management to remove the stimulus and then find reinforcers powerful enough to train alternative behaviors to the barking response. If you do both of these, you may not be able to eliminate it entirely just now, but I think you should be able to diminish it considerably in a very short time period.

* Tuna Brownies

Preheat oven to 250 degrees F.

Drain 2 regular sized cans of tuna and pour into large mixing bowl.

Mix in 2 eggs.

Mix in 1 1/2 cups of flour.

Add 1 tablespoon of garlic powder (or substitute with crushed garlic)

Blend well, into a doughy ball, and spread about 1/4 inch thick in a big, Greased cookie sheet.

Bake for about 25-30 minutes or until golden. Cut into tiny squares,

However small you need them. I also sprinkle extra garlic powder on top before putting it in the oven. I store them in the freezer because I make several batches at a time but they do keep for a good bit in an airtight container.

If your dogs like tuna brownies, try making liver ones sometime.

Liver brownies

1 pound chicken livers

1 package corn muffin mix

4 eggs

Large "glop" of fresh minced garlic

Preheat oven to 375F. Puree liver in food processor. Add other ingredients.

Blend until mixed well. Heavily grease a 9"x13" pan. Pour mix into pan. Bake

30 minutes or until it pulls away from the sides of the pan. Do not burn it,

you'll never get the smell out of your house again. (This recipe may be made with other types of liver than chicken, but the chicken liver doesn't have nearly as strong an odor as other types of liver do.)

When it's done, remove from oven, cool and cut into 1/2" squares. Freeze what you won't use right away.

Keeps for about 2 days outside of refrigerator, so chill bait bag or refrigerate when not actually training.